



MPA

MONTANA
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

February 4, 2007

Re: HB 5 ~ LRB funding
for Virginia & Nevada Cities

I am pleased to be here to speak on behalf of funding for the stabilization and preservation of properties at Virginia and Nevada Cities. For the past year and a half, MPA worked with the Governor's Council on Historic & Cultural Properties to explore state stewardship of heritage properties. We promoted this solution for two important reasons. First, Virginia and Nevada Cities are a treasure -- the best -- preserved gold mining camp and Western Frontier-period collections in our country, bar none. And secondly, because we KNOW, through years of experience and consistent data from across the nation, that preservation and heritage development are one of the most effective avenues to revitalizing local economies.

Today you are asked to approve a one-time expenditure of \$3 million to carry out urgently needed stabilization. A one time investment to safeguard an investment. When we Montanans purchased these outstanding resources the price tag was \$8 million. A decade later, that value has quadrupled, and like any asset, in order to safeguard the investment, some effort must be made to take good care of it. This requires continued hard work by the professionals with the Montana Heritage Commission, *and*, funding to repair and maintain the buildings there.

The frontier towns of Virginia City, and Nevada City house awesome false-front 1860s and 1870s buildings of the kind that are long gone most everywhere now. It's one reason why the nation's leading forum on vernacular architecture is planning its 2009 conference in Montana. It's why Frontier House, Harvard University and others have been interested in conducting programs here. *Those buildings and collections bring people to us.*

If you have visited you know, that Virginia City's blessing is also its curse. Music machines, carriages, Chinese collections, frontier buildings... There is so much, that concerted effort and investment are required to keep it whole. Over the last 10 years, the Heritage Commission has stepped up to meet that challenge and they have had partners like MPA and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, helping to cultivate the local capacity to preserve and promote heritage through tourism and local development.

All of this impressive work is making a *real* difference. (You might have seen last week's article on tourism heritage trails that we are helping local businesses to establish through the region.) The Governor's Council heard repeatedly that you can only build this kind of economic initiative on a solid base. And when you do, the efforts pay off in returned revenue and healthier towns. MHC has the stats -- on business expansion, job creation, dollars generated in the communities since they opened up shop.

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EXHIBIT 4
DATE 2-5-07
HB 5



MPA

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There have been millions of dollars in outside grants through Congress, the National Park Service and private sources, MHC operates a specialized preservation team skilled in log and frontier building work, and they have repaired a number of precarious and important buildings. But grants require match, and sometimes, investment by the owners themselves. It doesn't matter if it's a barn that needs a roof, a schoolhouse that needs its foundation reinforced or 250 frontier era buildings – effective maintenance often begins with a willingness to make the responsible investment that is required.

The Montana people entrusted the legislature to first secure and then oversee the amazing resources of Virginia and Nevada Cities, and their hope to have them preserved for future generations. It was one of the highest priorities for the Governor's Council to shore up failing buildings and protect an investment that also has much potential to help revitalize a region of Montana where the best community efforts are going into rejuvenating their economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

Chere Justo
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